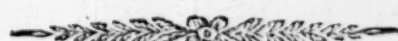


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A
DISCOURSE
DELIVERED AT THE
ORDINATION
OF THE
REV. ABEL FLINT,
TO
THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE
IN
A CHRISTIAN CHURCH
AT HARTFORD,
APRIL 20th, 1791.

——
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Christ in Providence.

——
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AUTHOR.



An Ordination Sermon.

I COR. III. 22.

WHETHER PAUL, OR APOLLOS, OR CEPHAS—
ALL ARE YOURS.

THERE is a striking analogy, in many respects, between the natural and moral worlds. In the former, we behold a beautiful variety, suited to meet the various senses, to gratify the diversified tastes, and to please the fancies of men. In the latter, we find an equal accommodation to their moral, intellectual and sentimental taste. Food for the mind, as well as the body, is provided in plenty and variety, served up in different forms, and by different hands ; yet all designed for the same end. In accommodation to the different capacities, dispositions and habits of men, and to facilitate their progress in knowledge and virtue, God has been pleased to communicate moral truths

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and religious sentiments, by a great diversity of men, ways and means. So far from becoming the occasion of party disputes and contentions, this diversity should be ranked among the other innumerable instances of divine goodness. It should excite in us emotions of gratitude and praise. It became, however, the cause of great altercation among the infantile christians at Corinth. Influenced by a selfish spirit, and not considering that, by the gospel, they were incorporated into one body, and made heirs to the same benefits, divisions arose among them on account of their different opinions of men and things.

St. Paul reproves them for their weakness in contending about the different talents of men employed in dispensing the same religion; especially as this diversity of gifts was designed to accommodate their various dispositions. They discovered a spirit unfriendly to the unity of the body of Christ, when they said—‘I am of Paul, and I of Apollos.’ This conduct the apostle reproves by inquiring—‘Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?’ Why these distinctions? Are they

not both ministers of the same gospel ; appointed to the same service, and for the same end ? Whatever gifts they possess are devoted to your edification. ‘ Therefore, let not man glory in men. For all things are yours : Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.’—It would be agreeable to pursue this beautiful climax thro all its gradations, and consider the inestimable privileges belonging to the christian world. But it will be necessary to collect our thoughts to a single point. To this, the words selected to give a lead to a discourse on the present occasion, direct our attention. ‘ Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas—all are yours.’

AFTER viewing the different features of their characters, we shall reduce the subject to a practical improvement.

IN drawing the distinguishing traits in these several characters, we shall be most particular with those of St. Paul. His writings furnish us with the greatest variety of materials.—Born at Tarsus, a city renowned for its

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literary advantages, of a lively and penetrating genius, educated in the school of science under the tuition of a learned doctor of laws, he became deeply learned in the laws and customs of his own country ; in the jurisprudence and hierarchy of his own nation.

To his acquaintance with the literature of the ancients, and with the laws, religion and science of his own times, are we to ascribe his masterly reasonings in favor of christianity, as a scheme arising from, and grafted upon the mosaic dispensation. A scheme which, without unchurching the Jews, admitted the Gentiles to equal privileges with them. To his acquaintance with the poetry of the heathen, are we to ascribe the many apt figures, the animating and beautiful images which embellish and enliven his writings. But what is the most profound erudition, what the smoothly flowing period, what the ornaments of style, in comparison with the virtues of the mind, a heart formed to piety, sensibility and goodness? Our christian apostle considers all his other acquirements of little worth, compared with 'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' Tho

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he had 'profited above his equals,' (in years) at the feet of Gamaliel, yet he estimates the knowledge he acquired at the feet of Jesus as of infinitely greater value. He does not mean to depreciate the sciences, nor to undervalue the learning he had gained in the schools; but to exalt the knowledge he acquired in the school of Christ. The former enabled him to shine with distinguished lustre as a christian minister. The latter guided his way to divine truth, which unbosomed itself to his mind, from the fountain of light and truth. Subdued in his way to Damascus, his prejudices, which till now had blinded his eyes, yielded to the force of truth, and he anxiously inquired, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'

INFLUENCED by a sense of the abounding mercy and grace of God, whereof he was made a partaker, enlightened by his spirit, and prompted by an ardent desire that others should share the same blessings, he went forth in the full powers of reason, eloquence and zeal, to enlighten, convince and persuade men. He stood forth in the midst of dangers, sufferings and death, to plead the cause of truth and righteous-

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ness ; and accounted his life of so much greater value, by how much the more he might be enabled to 'win souls to Christ.'

His writings happily unite elegance, neatness and chaste simplicity of style, with perspicuity and conciseness in composition. He affects not the fraudulent arts of the orator, his subject needs them not ; but 'with great plainness of speech' he touches the grave, the pathetic and the sublime. Never, perhaps, was there comprized, in so small a compass, a greater variety of useful and entertaining sentiments, than in his writings. His epistles are a magazine of the most extensive, agreeable and useful knowledge. His addresses are pertinent and pungent, but kind and affectionate. Calculated to gratify the imagination, while they enlighten the understanding and touch the heart, they persuaded the unbelieving, and made great offenders tremble. As a reasoner, he is nervous ; as a writer, close and compact ; and he never loses sight of his subject. That which gives weight and worth to the whole, is, he spake nothing but what he felt, and wrote nothing but what he conceived to be dictated by the spirit of truth. In his heart and affec-

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tions reigned that gospel of which he was a minister.

To all the christian world it may be said—
This Paul, the learned scholar, the profound reasoner, the exalted christian, 'is yours.' His preaching benefited those of his own day. His writings are profitable for every age. They abound with the finest strokes of morality. They charm the ear by sublime comments on the unfathomable riches of divine grace; in proclaiming to a guilty world that mercy, which would be unto eternal life to all who believe and obey the gospel. They warm the heart with devotion and piety, while they inspire the most unbounded charity to men. These writings have been preserved from the moth of time, and the violence of faction; and handed down to us with general uncorruptness. They are worthy the attention of every one, who has any taste for excellence in sentiment, fairness in reasoning, or perspicuity in style.

SCARCELY need I digress from the pursuit of my design, in this place, to remind my respected audience of the interest they have in those excellent writings. Children of men!

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For you were they delivered. For you have those masterly reasonings, those manly counsels, reproofs and instructions been compiled and preserved; that the body of Christ, the church, may be built up and edified. To them you will do well to take heed as to a light shining in a dark place to guide the benighted traveller, to illumine the path in which you should walk.

CAN it be needful—I am sure it cannot be amiss—to call to the minds of his successors, his eminent example as a proper model for all christian ministers. May they resemble him more and more in that warmth of devotion, that ardent piety, that extent of charity which marked his character! No less may their public ministrations bear the stamp of good sense, judicious reasonings, excellence of sentiment and catholicism of spirit.

It is with peculiar pleasure that I contemplate the prospects of this society in this respect. The young gentleman, who is now to be instituted a christian minister, and designated to the pastoral office in this congregation of the christian church, will, I doubt not, cheerfully adopt

this excellent model ; and feel himself happy in yielding his utmost powers to their service. Like Paul, will he avoid useless speculations and unedifying theories. He will be more solicitous to offer his hearers useful sentiments, and practical truths, than to amuse them with paradoxes, and systems of his own contrivance ; making perspicuity and persuasion the great object of his public performances ; exemplary piety and virtue of his private conduct. While he does this with fidelity, and a manly fervor, we cannot doubt but they will receive him in love. Casting the mantle of charity over the infirmities of the man, they will respect the minister, and endeavor to profit by his learning and piety, and by his exemplary life and conversation.

‘ ALL things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos.’

IN the history of the acts of the Apostles, St. Luke speaks of Apollos as ‘an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures.’ To a thorough acquaintance with the scriptures, we may reasonably suppose he added a lively, a commanding voice, an energy of expression that rendered him an agreeable and useful preacher.

Furnished with the voice of thunder and clothed with the vivid rays of lightning, his preaching was suited to rouse the slumbering, to carry conviction to the seared conscience, and to excite the hardened offender to fly from impending ruin. Doubtless the commanding force of his elocution touched the passions of many, and probably convinced the judgment of some. To little purpose are the passions excited, unless the understanding is informed, and the judgment directed. Nor does the conscience always feel the force of the truths to which the mind gives its assent. Reason often becomes the dupe of passion, and we suffer ourselves to be carried away contrary to our judgment. Therefore, it is said—‘ Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God gives the increase.’ The spirit of God attending those means he hath appointed, renders them effectual to the attentive and considerate. Alike devoted to the good of the church are the reasoning of Paul and the eloquence of Apollos.

IN the same sense ‘Cephas is yours.’

THIS title our Lord bestowed on Peter on account of his firmness, and the future use he should make of him in building up his church.

He appears to have been a person of a sanguine temper, great courage and fortitude. Fired with an honest zeal in his master's cause, but perhaps too much elated by the marks of distinction conferred on him by Christ, he suffered a most severe trial of his attachment to his lord. He fell disgraceful. Alas for the ministers of religion ! What need have they of firmness and courage ?—This proved an useful lesson to him. May it be so to them ! Who is always proof against temptation ? Peter yielded to its violence. The reflection embittered all his days. His example stands as a beacon to warn all succeeding ministers of the folly of presumption, and the duty of repentance.

He afterwards discovered great magnanimity in preaching the gospel in the face of a persecuting world. He sealed the truth with his blood, and that in a manner that showed the sincerity of his repentance, and of his attachment to Christ. He preached the first sermon ever delivered in defence of christianity ; in which he proved the truth of the new testament by the fulfilment of the old. He showed his hearers that many of their ancient prophecies were that day fulfilled. He proved to the conviction of

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many, that 'Jesus whom they had wickedly, and contrary to their own law put to death,' was the Messiah. His epistles are of great use in the christian world. They are written in a pleasing, animating strain. They were designed to guard christians in his day against apostacy, and the vices to which they were peculiarly exposed, to confirm the christian hope, to support the heart in affliction, to carry consolation to the house of woe, to bring back the wandering sinner to God and happiness, and to excite the christian to diligence, steadfastness and perseverance in the duties of moral, social and domestic life, thro all ages of the christian church. Thus are 'Paul, Apollos and Cephas yours.'

SINCE the ministers, the means and ordinances of religion are all appointed for the good of men, how culpable are they who make these the occasion of division and animosity in the christian church.

To such the inquiry of St. Paul will pertinently apply—'Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? Why then is the church of Christ rent by endless divisions, and torn by

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perpetual animosities ? ' The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the holy ghost.' The essence, and indispensable obligations of the christian religion consist in substantial virtue and piety, in charity and peaceableness, and in that joy and cheerfulness which result from a heart purified, and a life directed by the word of God. In these great principles all are agreed.

SHALL those, who are agreed in the essential properties of the christian religion, contend because they have different apprehensions about some less matters, and are not alike clear as to the external forms of profession ? Differences that arise among christians are generally about things of less consequence ; about sentiments formed merely on matters of opinion to which men are determined partly by constitution, more by accidental causes, most of all by education and habit. There is no dispute whether men should be virtuous, pious and good. Suppose then that they become so under the nurturing hand of different forms, men or schemes ; shall we go about to proselyte them from one communion to another ? Of all the evil spirits that

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ever infested society a profelyting spirit is the worst, most destructive of peace, most baneful to pure and undefiled religion; and most dishonorable to christianity.

BUT the common mischief is, that those who are very zealous to convert others to their own sentiments and observances, fancy that those people have no virtue who are not of the same religious persuasion with themselves; that they are deficient in understanding because they do not adopt the same opinions. In the mist of metaphysics, or of superstition, they loose sight of charity; and are more zealous for modes of faith than for the virtues of the christian life, or the peace of society.

CEASE, thou demon of strife, any longer to wound the bleeding cause of christianity! Let the present enlightened age commence the happy era of an universally tolerant spirit. Science and religion can never have their proper scope but when nurtured in the soil of liberty. By liberty, I mean an independent spirit of inquiry, free from the shackles of superstition, the wild-fire of enthusiasm, or the terrors of bigotry.

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As to the free exercise of the rights of conscience, we enjoy it in perfection. It is our happy lot, my fellow christians, to live in a country that has the honor of exhibiting the first instance the world ever saw, of a civil government established in favor of universal liberty. 'It is the glory of the united states, that, with the star of empire, fixed therein is the brighter sun of universal toleration.' May we not here see the dawn of brighter days on earth? May we not indulge a hope that the period is not far distant when the different sects, which divide the christian name, inspired with the true spirit of candor, shall affectionately harmonize in promoting a common cause; that heaven-born religion, whose great object was to prepare subjects for the kingdom of glory above, by promoting peace on earth and good will among men.

SECONDLY, we are led to reflect with gratitude on the goodness of God in the care he has taken to diffuse useful knowledge, and preserve order in the world. To this end were the holy scriptures compiled, and the ministry instituted. Not only has he founded his church on a rock, and guarded it against the assaults of violence;

but provided means of security against the inroads of infidelity, the cants of railery, and the ridicule of the scoffer. The powers of wit have been employed against the scriptures without success. Indeed, they have gathered lustre from its polishing hand. That the means of knowledge might never be wanting, and that men, too easily absorbed by the cares and pleasures of the world, might never be left without friendly counsel, he sent forth his apostles with learning, eloquence, and zeal to preach and establish the gospel. These have been succeeded by the ministers of religion, endued with various gifts to suit that variety of taste, and to supply that variety of call which the circumstances of the world might make.

For your good they are appointed. They are 'chosen from among men and ordained for men in things pertaining to God.' To your service their powers are all devoted. Their time is principally to be employed in reading and study, in acquiring a knowledge of the scriptures, and the great principles of religion, that they may be able to unfold the same in a rational and consistent manner. To do this

understandingly, and to urge the practice of duty in that variety of light which is requisite to catch the ear, to engage the attention, and to suit the capacity of all, requires much labor and application. Whatever they are, whatever they have, all are yours. Not a ray of light beams on their mind, but it is reflected upon your path. Not an effort within their power, but the faithful minister is willing to make it for the good of the church. This is an institution of heaven, wisely contrived for the promotion of knowledge and virtue. As there are but few who have opportunity to inquire thoroughly into the truth, or to explain the meaning of the more intricate parts of scripture, or open to view the various relations of men from which their duties and obligations arise; it is of high importance that some individuals should be set apart for this purpose. Often is it necessary that we be reminded of our duty, and urged to the practice of it by motives addressed in different forms. We need the learning of a Paul to teach us, the eloquence of an Apollos to rouse us from supineness and inattention, and the warmer zeal of a Cephas to enliven and confirm us, that we may be steadfast to the end.

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THE subject furnishes us, in the third place, with some instruction as to the manner both of preaching and hearing the gospel. It is, indeed, of little consequence what we say or how we say it, unless our temper and practice correspond with the purity of the gospel. A holy life is the most persuasive sermon, expressed too in a language which all men can understand. Our light should shine not only from the desk, but from the theatre of action. In the ordinary course of life, circumspection should mark all our conduct. There is a dignity and propriety of character to which it becomes us to aspire; in the neglect of which, religion, with its ministers, often suffers. In composition and discourse, we are not to disregard what is beautiful and pleasing. There is an elegance, neatness and chaste simplicity of composition that adds to the worth of the best sermons. Nor are gracefulness and energy in delivery below our notice. Of these we have excellent models in the characters we have just been viewing. If we expect the public to hear and attend to what is offered them, we ought to consider what and how we offer. What right has any one to obtrude on an enlightened audience, the

indigested reveries of his own imagination ; or to claim their patient hearing of the crude extemporaneous effusions of his mind on those great subjects which it requires much time and study to digest and arrange ? A regular discourse makes a more lasting impression upon the hearer than detached sentences, and gives to his rational powers a more salutary exercise.

Not that we are to address the ear, without attempting to better the heart. This would be to amuse, not to edify. The great doctrines and duties of religion should engage our main attention. To open and explain the peculiar doctrines of christianity, to urge the duties of it by the regards we owe to Christ, to handle every subject of discourse on christian principles, seems to be the peculiar business of the christian minister. 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants, for Jesus' sake.' The advancement of his kingdom, and the salvation of men form the great object of the ministry ; and when we bear to the world those important concerns in a decent, and an affectionate manner, I think

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we may reasonably expect their attendance, and candid hearing.

WITH this observation I shall close the discourse. If any decline to give the gospel a hearing under a notion that it may not be true, they should consider that it is a question of a high and important nature whether the gospel be from God or not. It claims to be from him, and carries evidences of the justice of the claim that cannot be resisted. Whatever difficulties or objections may arise in the mind about the truth of revelation, yet when we view its internal characters we find the surest marks of divinity. It has for its object the best interests of men. It presents to the mind a vast variety of the most instructive and interesting truths, inspires the most august ideas, relieves it under the bitterest pains by the balm of hope, pours into our bosom the most refined joys, and is divinely accommodated to our present state and condition.

IF any should still doubt its authenticity, yet it is a question of so high a nature as to demand their attention, and further inquiry; and such is the importance of public worship to the world

that it claims their countenance and attendance on the outward forms of instruction whatever may be their speculative opinions. The things of which we discourse to you are of all the most interesting. They extend their influence thro the varying scenes and concerns of life. They forsake us not in the vale of death. Yea, they treat of the great things of another state of existence, of worlds dissolving with fervent heat, of the universal wreck of nature, of a day of final recompence, of the joys of an eternal heaven, and of the perdition of ungodly men. These, these, Sirs, are the momentous subjects addressed to your ears ! Do they not deserve your constant and deliberate attention ?—Hear, then, Oh ! hear, for his sake, who from the lofty height of his habitation, speaks in his word ; for his sake, who, expiring on Calvary's awful top, gave birth to the most benevolent scheme of religion that ever blest the race of man ; yea, hear that your souls may live.

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